



U.S. Customs and Border Protection



United States Attorney's Office
District of Arizona

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION OFFICERS FREE UNDOCUMENTED ALIENS DURING ALIEN SMUGGLING ATTEMPT AT NOGALES PORT OF ENTRY

Eight hidden inside water tanks in back of van.

NOGALES, Ariz – U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers at the Nogales port of entry encountered an unusual occurrence early Wednesday morning when they found eight undocumented aliens hidden inside two water tanks in the back of a commercial van.

At around 1:20 a.m. on April 4, 2007, CBP officers screening vehicles and people coming into the country through the Deconcini port of entry in Nogales were questioning the driver of a van carrying equipment for cleaning carpets when they became suspicious of his answers to routine questions. Suspecting an attempt to hide something from the officers, they decided to perform an intensive inspection on the vehicle and contents.

While talking with the driver in the inspection area and looking inside the van, the officers noticed something unusual about two water tanks in the back and went to get a closer look. During the inspection, the officers discovered people hidden inside the tanks.

Due to concern for the health and safety of anyone inside, several officers immediately began working on opening the water tanks while others took the driver into custody. The officers working on freeing the people inside had to lift the tanks off the floor of the vehicle and assist those hidden inside by sliding out from beneath them.

“Due to CBP’s continued enforcement efforts, what we saw during this incident demonstrates the extreme measures that smugglers are willing to utilize to sneak people and contraband into the country,” said Port Director James Tong.

The driver, 53-year-old Kenneth Claunch of Bakersfield, Arizona was arrested in connection with the failed smuggling attempt. He was charged by complaint with alien smuggling and had his initial appearance on April 5, 2007. Claunch faces a potential maximum penalty of 10 years and a \$250,000 fine. He was detained pending the outcome of a hearing on Monday April 9, 2007. Three of the aliens are being held as material witnesses, the others were returned to Mexico.

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A criminal complaint is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation in this case was conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The prosecution is being handled by Serra Tsethlikai, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: 07-00461M
RELEASE NUMBER: 2007-100(Claunch)

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